

INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION PERFORMANCE: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF INDONESIA PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Growing competition among higher education institutions, particularly private universities, demands continuous enhancement of organizational performance. Transformational leadership, specifically intellectual stimulation, is viewed as a key driver in strengthening institutional outcomes. This study seeks to empirically assess the influence of intellectual stimulation on the performance of private higher education institutions in Indonesia. Using a deductive and causal research design, data were gathered through a survey of institutional leaders in Southern Sumatra, yielding 163 valid responses from 205 distributed questionnaires.

The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and the results confirmed that the proposed model satisfied goodness-of-fit standards. Findings demonstrate that intellectual stimulation significantly and positively affects institutional performance. Leadership behaviors that promote critical thinking, creativity, and innovation therefore play an essential role in improving organizational effectiveness. The study contributes to the literature on transformational leadership in higher education and provides practical guidance for enhancing leadership practices in private universities. Practically, the findings also suggest that private higher education institutions should strengthen leadership practices that encourage intellectual stimulation among academicians in order to improve institutional governance and long-term organizational performance.

Keywords: *intellectual stimulation, transformational leadership, higher education performance, empirical study*

INTRODUCTION

Most studies on organizational behavior posit performance as an outcome of organizational behavior and human resource management. Some researchers have reviewed the relationship between performance outcome variables and other variables, such as motivation (Hendijani et al., 2016), organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Indarti et al., 2017), and organizational culture (Tan, 2019). The interrelationship between these variables demonstrates that performance is a crucial variable that needs to be examined to address future challenges in achieving goals and maintaining the existence of organizations, including universities.

Yahya & Amalia (2016) stated that higher education performance faces significant challenges in several areas, including the development of information technology, high performance demands, improved services and improvements to teaching and learning facilities, and the acceptance of higher-quality students. Research conducted by (Wiradinata, 2011) indicates that universities, particularly private universities, still have significant challenges to address. These include the presence of multiple positions within key structures, low graduate quality, minimal research and publications, low student enrollment,

inadequate teaching staff qualifications, inadequate campus and academic facilities, organizations that are not operating effectively and dynamically, and low trust from educational stakeholders. This is where the role of university leaders or administrators is crucial in determining the success of a university. University leaders are the driving force behind the organization, serving as the foundation for the academic community within it to achieve its vision and mission. Leadership plays a crucial role, particularly in fostering more effective performance in line with the established vision and mission. Organizations that implement leadership that aligns with the characteristics of their members will maximize the achievement of their goals. Among the types of leadership commonly applied in various organizations, the transformational leadership type, which contains elements of intellectual stimulation, is considered the most suitable for application in the world of education (Geijsel et al., 2003; Onorato, 2013; Anderson, 2017).

The study of the relationship between intellectual stimulation and organizational performance is a topic of interest among researchers in human resource management and organizational behavior. Intellectual stimulation is typically considered part of the

transformational leadership variable, which is linked to organizational outcomes. Most research indicates that intellectual stimulation is a determining factor in organizational success.

Recent studies have demonstrated a relationship between these two variables. Research conducted by Ondari et.al. (2018) used linear regression analysis. They conducted a study with 165 respondents who were leaders of state-owned enterprises in Kenya. The results showed that intellectual stimulation was significantly related to organizational performance at these enterprises. Similarly, a recent study by Gitu & Awuor(2020) with 87 respondents from the management level at a pipeline company in Kenya found that using regression analysis, intellectual stimulation had a limited effect on organizational performance at the Kenyan pipeline company. Another study, using a different country context and analytical tools, was conducted by Pongpearchan (2016), who studied 400 Toyota dealerships in Thailand. Using ordinary least squares regression, this study found that intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation have a significant relationship with corporate success. Another study using ordinary least squares regression analysis was conducted by Tahir (2015), who studied 800

respondents from the corporate sector in Pakistan. The results concluded that intellectual stimulation has a significant positive effect on organizational performance.

Although the literature shows positive results regarding the relationship between leadership roles and organizational performance, there are important research gaps that need to be addressed. First, most previous research was conducted in the context of business organizations or the industrial sector, while empirical studies specifically examining the effect of intellectual stimulation on the performance of higher education institutions, particularly Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEI), are relatively limited. Second, previous research has focused primarily on the context of developed or developing countries outside Indonesia, so the generalizability of the findings to the context of private universities in Indonesia still requires further testing. Third, some studies position intellectual stimulation as part of the overall transformational leadership construct, rather than as an independent variable specifically tested for organizational performance. The last, Southern Sumatra represents an important context for examining leadership and institutional performance because the region comprises a large number of private higher education institutions operating under

intense competition for student enrollment, faculty quality, research productivity, and institutional accreditation. Similar to many other regions in Indonesia, private universities in Southern Sumatra face increasing pressure to improve organizational effectiveness while responding to demographic changes, resource constraints, and evolving quality assurance standards. These contextual characteristics make Southern Sumatra an appropriate empirical setting for investigating whether intellectual stimulation can enhance institutional performance within Indonesian private higher education.

Based on these gaps, this research is crucial to empirically examine the influence of intellectual stimulation on the performance of private universities in Southern Sumatra, Indonesia. This study is expected to enrich the literature on leadership in the higher education sector and provide practical contributions to university administrators in designing more effective and contextual leadership practices.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Transformational Leadership

Effective leadership is essentially characterized by several key characteristics, including communication skills, integrity, concern for others,

rewarding achievement, teamwork orientation, forward-looking vision and ideas, assertiveness coupled with responsibility, and competence (Drouillard & Kleiner, 1996). These characteristics demonstrate that a qualified leader is able to positively influence subordinates by stimulating ideas, ultimately fostering members' self-confidence as an integral part of the organization. Once this self-confidence is established, the leader's role emphasizes motivational functions, so that members feel a sense of connection between themselves and the organization. This leadership style is categorized by (Burns, 1978) as transformational leadership.

He defined transformational leadership as a reciprocal process of interaction between leaders and followers in mobilizing various resources based on specific motives and values to achieve shared goals in a context of competition and conflict. Meanwhile, Bass & Avolio, as cited in Walumbwa et al. (2008), view transformational leadership as a leader's ability to transform followers' values, needs, aspirations, and priorities, while simultaneously motivating them to exceed initial expectations. Thus, transformational leadership is oriented toward developing the potential of organizational members and strengthening their commitment through the advancement of more

meaningful goals.

In the context of the education sector, leadership plays a strategic role, particularly in driving the changes needed to achieve more effective organizational management. Educational organizations that implement leadership styles aligned with the characteristics of their members have a greater chance of optimally achieving their goals (Bakhri et al., 2025). Therefore, transformational leadership is seen as a relevant approach, given its characteristics that emphasize the involvement and motivation of organizational members.

Leithwood & Jantzi (2000) suggest that transformational leadership in educational organizations encompasses several key factors. First, initiating and identifying a vision, namely the leader's role in formulating and developing the educational institution's vision, thereby increasing educator commitment to strive harder to achieve organizational goals. Second, individual support and consideration, which emphasizes the leader's attention to the development and mentoring of educators, including through the delegation of challenging tasks, providing feedback, and recognizing and meeting individual educator needs. Third, intellectual stimulation. In this factor, transformational leaders stimulate creativity and professionalism by encouraging teachers to question their beliefs and values, and by

enhancing their ability to solve complex problems.

In line with the views of previous experts, Robbins & Judge (2013) suggest that transformational leadership is characterized by four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These four dimensions represent the leader's behavior in influencing, motivating, and developing followers holistically.

Based on this framework, intellectual stimulation can be understood as a leadership characteristic that encourages organizational members to think rationally, critically, and innovatively in dealing with various situations. This stimulation emphasizes the leader's efforts to encourage members to review routine practices and foster new ideas relevant to the challenges they face. Through this approach, members are guided to develop more creative and adaptive mindsets in response to emerging problems.

Intellectual Stimulation

Intellectual stimulation is a key element of transformational leadership and is often used as an independent variable in various evaluative studies (Orabi, 2016). In management literature, the role of intellectual stimulation on organizational

performance is analyzed as a factor influencing various individual work outcomes within the organization. Leithwood & Jantzi (2006) explain that through intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders encourage increased creativity and professionalism by encouraging staff to re-examine their beliefs and values, while simultaneously developing their ability to solve complex problems.

Intellectual stimulation occurs when leaders encourage followers to be innovative and creative by challenging existing assumptions, reformulating problems, and approaching old situations with new approaches (Sandvik et al., 2018). Based on these characteristics, leaders who implement intellectual stimulation encourage organizational members to innovate in problem-solving, develop their potential, and set challenging work goals. This practice not only provides space for members to be creative and innovative but also fosters their commitment and involvement in developing the organization's vision.

Avolio et al. (1999) identified four key indicators of intellectual stimulation: a leader's ability to encourage re-examination of existing assumptions, seek alternative perspectives, propose new approaches, and present divergent viewpoints. These four indicators can be used to reflect organizational achievements or outcomes. In line with

this, Yukl & Gardner (2020) emphasized that leaders who emphasize intellectual stimulation need to demonstrate support, provide encouragement, and facilitate training for their followers.

Furthermore, intellectual stimulation contributes to improving an individual's ability to complete tasks, generate innovative ideas, and encourage subordinates to express new ideas. This dimension is a key component of leadership oriented toward organizational improvement through creativity and knowledge creation to build sustainable competitive advantage (Avolio et al., 1999). Innovation itself rests on creative knowledge developed through intellectual stimulation (Nghah & Ibrahim, 2012). Ultimately, the intellectual capital developed will contribute to improving organizational performance and strengthening its competitive position.

Higher Education Performance

Organizational performance is a broad concept in management studies and, to date, lacks a single, agreed-upon definition, given the diverse perspectives used. However, organizational performance can be understood as the level of achievement of an organization's programs and policies in realizing the vision, mission, and objectives formulated in the organization's strategic plan

(Mahsun, 2006). Organizations that employ a leadership style aligned with the characteristics of their members tend to achieve more optimal performance.

Performance is a crucial concept for organizations, indicating the extent to which organizational tasks are carried out in order to achieve goals. Kren & Sellei (2020) stated that performance is inseparable from the contributions of individual members to the organization, making organizational performance a factor that can be used to improve organizational effectiveness. Organizational performance is so important that it is necessary to analyze the individual, group, and organization factors involved in shaping organizational behavior.

Mishra & Suar (2010) view organizational performance from at least two main dimensions: financial and non-financial performance. Financial performance generally focuses on past achievements and relies on the utilization of the organization's tangible assets. This approach often makes organizations less able to identify the potential of intangible assets that could positively contribute to organizational sustainability. Conversely, non-financial performance measurement places greater emphasis on long-term success stemming from intangible assets, such as reputation, the quality of supplier relationships, and legitimacy from external stakeholders.

However, the primary organizational challenge lies not solely in the complexity of performance measurement, but rather in the demand for high performance and the strategies employed to achieve it. This demand applies not only to for-profit organizations but also to various non-profit organizations, including universities. Universities face increasingly fierce competition among higher education providers. This situation forces each university to demonstrate superior performance to attract public interest. Universities perceived as having high performance tend to be the primary choice, while those unable to demonstrate adequate performance are likely to be abandoned by prospective students.

Increased competition among universities has two main consequences. Wahyudin (2015) stated that on the positive side, this competition encourages improvements in service quality and educational attainment. However, on the other hand, competition can also have a negative impact, resulting in a decline in student numbers at some Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEI). This is due to PHEI's high dependence on student funding sources, such as educational development contributions, institutional development contributions, and tuition fees. Therefore,

the sustainability of PHEI in Indonesia is largely determined by the institution's ability to meet an adequate student intake; PHEI with a stable student body have a greater opportunity for growth than those unable to meet the minimum student intake.

Measuring the performance of higher education institutions differs from that of companies, as it places greater emphasis on the non-profit aspect. Dill (1999) proposed five main dimensions for assessing higher education performance: curriculum design, pedagogical design, implementation quality, graduate outcomes, and resource availability. These five dimensions explicitly reflect a non-commercial orientation in higher education management.

Barney & Hesterly (2020) stated that a university's performance can be categorized as good if the institution is able to carry out education and teaching activities, research, and community service in a manner superior to that of other universities. Meanwhile, Hill & Jones (2009) argue that university rankings can be used as an indicator to represent the performance of higher education institutions.

In Indonesia, Law Number 12 of 2012 emphasizes that the primary duties of universities include implementing the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi, namely education and teaching, research, and

community service. Within the framework of universities as corporate entities, the implementation of the Tri Dharma is a primary indicator of institutional performance. Referring to the concept of superior performance, characterized by above-average achievements in an industry, a university's performance can be considered superior if it achieves a better ranking than other universities.

Based on these various perspectives and the regulatory framework in Indonesia, university rankings can be used as an indicator of institutional performance. Higher education rankings are understood as the outcome of an institution's ability to conduct education and teaching, research, and community service. Therefore, to complement the Tri Dharma indicators in measuring university performance, this study also adopted higher education rankings or reputation as an additional performance indicator.

These rankings reflect external recognition of a university's quality based on specific criteria. In the context of higher education, institutional accreditation is one form of this reputational recognition. Karathanos & Karathanos (1996) stated that, from a management and business perspective, higher education performance can be measured through qualification standards established by formal accreditation bodies. This aligns with

Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005, Article 1, paragraph 21, which states that higher education rankings can be assessed based on their accreditation status. Accreditation is an evaluation process of the quality and suitability of an institution or study program conducted by an independent agency outside of higher education (Makhoul, 2019). Based on these conceptual and empirical descriptions, the hypothesis proposed in this study is that intellectual stimulation has a positive effect on organizational performance.

METHODS

This study employs a deductive approach encompassing both exploratory and explanatory research. Exploratory research is used to identify relatively new relationship patterns, while explanatory research aims to explain phenomena or indications emerging from the research object. Through this deductive approach, data is analyzed empirically and systematically, then compared with relevant theoretical frameworks. Based on the research objectives, this study is classified as causal research, which seeks to explain the causal relationship between intellectual stimulation and organizational performance. The respondents in this study were institutional leaders representing private higher education institutions in Southern

Sumatra. Specifically, the respondents consisted of Rectors from universities and institutes, Chairpersons from colleges (Sekolah Tinggi), and Directors from polytechnics.

Data collection was conducted through the distribution of 205 questionnaires, both online and offline. Offline data collection was conducted through direct field data collection, while online data collection utilized the Google Forms application. Of the total questionnaires distributed, 163 (79.5%) were returned and used for analysis, while 42 (20.5%) were incomplete. The response rate of 79.5% was deemed adequate, referring to Sekaran and Bougie (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), who stated that a response rate of 30% is acceptable in survey research.

The 163 valid questionnaires were then analyzed using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach, producing a model that met the goodness of fit criteria. This sample size was deemed sufficient based on the recommendations of Hair et al. (2014), who suggest a sample size of between 100 and 200 respondents for SEM analysis.

The research instrument consisted of 16 questions measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with scores ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The intellectual stimulation variable was

measured using eight questions adapted from MacKenzie et al. (2001) and (2009). Questions include “Our institution informs employees about how work is done”, “Our institution encourages employees to think about the best way to do their work”, “Our institution encourages employees to generate new ideas for the institution's progress”, and “Our institution supports employees in expressing ideas and perspectives from different perspectives”. Meanwhile, the higher education performance measurement was developed based on indicators proposed by Karathanos and Karathanos (1996) and Barney and Hesterly (2020). Questions include “Our institution consistently develops teaching materials”, “Our institution publishes research in reputable scientific journals”, “Our institution actively participates in community service activities”, and “Our institution produces competent output according to community needs”.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 show the demographics of respondents consisting of gender, age, level of education, length of work experience, and functional position.

Direct effect analysis was conducted to test the relationship between variables as formulated in the research hypothesis. Hypothesis testing was conducted on a

model that met the goodness of fit criteria for each proposed relationship parameter. In the full model SEM analysis stage, evaluation was conducted through model fit testing and statistical tests. The results of the research model testing, shown in **Figure 1**, indicate that all path coefficients are positive, consistent with the direction of the hypothesized relationship. Furthermore, the results of the direct effect testing are presented through regression weight values or path coefficients, as listed in **Table 2**.

After the SEM model was declared to meet the suitability criteria, a significance test was conducted to determine the relationship between variables. This test was conducted partially by comparing the critical ratio (CR) or significance level (probability/p-value) to the resulting regression weights. The critical ratio (CR) value is equivalent to the t-value in conventional (non-structural) regression analysis. The resulting structural model comprehensively explains the causal relationship between intellectual stimulation and higher education performance through the development of a single integrated model from each factor tested in the previous stage.

After testing the model, a good fit index was obtained, reflected in a high chi-square value of 99.561 with a probability of 0.328 and a CMIN/DF of 1.059, a GFI of 0.930 and an AGFI of 0.899, a TLI of

0.996, a CFI of 0.997, and an RMSEA of 0.019. The calculations under the goodness of fit criteria for the model, as described above, demonstrate that compatibility is well established.

Thus, it can be concluded that the developed model is able to adequately represent the causal relationship between the variables studied, making it worthy of acceptance and use for further analysis. The test results presented in **Table 1** were used to evaluate the critical ratio (CR) value and the significance level (p-value). Based on the parameter estimates of the relationship between the intellectual stimulation variable and the performance of private universities, a path coefficient with a positive direction was obtained. The significance test showed a CR value of 7.978 with a probability value of less than 0.05. A significance level below the 0.05 limit indicates that intellectual stimulation has a significant effect on the performance of private universities. Therefore, the results of this statistical test support and accept the previously formulated hypothesis.

The significant influence of intellectual stimulation on higher education performance has important implications in the context of Indonesia's higher education policy. In recent years, private higher education institutions have been required to adapt to various national

initiatives aimed at improving academic quality, institutional competitiveness, and graduate outcomes. These include the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy, Outcome-Based Education (OBE), and increasingly stringent accreditation standards that emphasize innovation in learning, research productivity, community engagement, and collaboration with industry. These policy initiatives require institutional leaders to encourage lecturers and academic staff to think critically, develop innovative learning strategies, and continuously improve institutional practices.

In this context, intellectual stimulation becomes an essential leadership capability because it encourages organizational members to challenge conventional approaches, generate creative solutions, and respond proactively to policy changes. Leaders who promote open dialogue, knowledge sharing, and innovation are more likely to facilitate successful implementation of MBKM programs, improve scientific publication performance, strengthen research collaboration, and enhance institutional quality assurance systems.

Beyond its statistical significance, intellectual stimulation may improve higher education performance by fostering an organizational climate that values

innovation, continuous learning, and adaptability. Leaders who challenge existing assumptions and encourage lecturers and academic staff to explore new ideas create opportunities for innovative teaching methods, interdisciplinary collaboration, and more effective institutional problem-solving. Such an environment enables higher education institutions to respond more quickly to changes in educational policies, technological developments, and the evolving expectations of students and external stakeholders.

Another possible explanation is that intellectual stimulation enhances lecturers' psychological engagement and sense of ownership toward institutional development. When leaders encourage participation in decision-making, appreciate diverse perspectives, and support experimentation with new approaches, lecturers are more likely to feel valued and empowered. This condition strengthens collaborative behavior, organizational commitment, and voluntary contributions beyond formal job responsibilities, which ultimately improve academic and managerial performance. As

a result, intellectual stimulation serves as a catalyst for developing a more committed academic community capable of sustaining institutional excellence.

Intellectual stimulation may also strengthen research performance by encouraging lecturers to develop innovative research ideas, establish interdisciplinary collaborations, and seek external research funding. Leaders who promote critical inquiry and intellectual exchange create an academic culture where research and scientific publication become integral components of institutional development rather than merely administrative obligations.

Leaders who stimulate critical thinking and encourage the exchange of ideas create an academic environment that supports collaboration, innovation, and continuous organizational learning (Bakhri and Pariyanti, 2025). Such conditions enable lecturers and academic staff to contribute more actively to institutional development, thereby strengthening organizational performance and enhancing the competitiveness of private higher education institutions.

Table 1. Respondent Description

Demography	Category	Amount	%
Gender	Male	110	67.48
	Female	53	32.52
Age	<30 y.o.	20	12.27
	31 y.o - 40 y.o	39	23.93
	41 y.o - 50 y.o	56	34.36
	>51 y.o.	48	29.45
Level of education	Master Degree/S2	144	88.34
	Doctoral Degree/S3	19	11.66
Length of work	3-5 y.o.	22	13.50
	6-10 y.o.	40	24.54
	11-15 y.o.	43	26.38
	>16 y.o.	58	35.58
Functional Positions	Professor	2	1.23
	Associate Professor	14	8.59
	Assistant Professor	147	90.18

Source: Primary data processed, 2022

Figure 1: Full model SEM

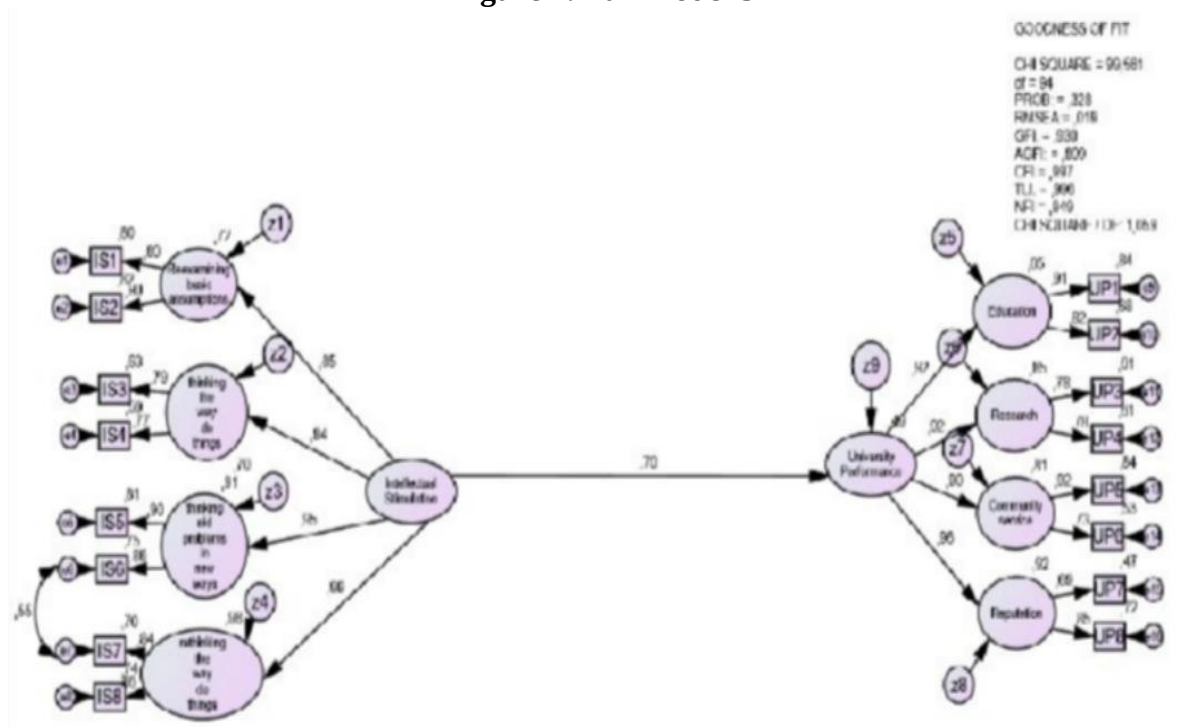


Table 2.
Weight Structural Equational Regression

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Summary
University Performance	← Intellectual Stimulation	.822	.103	7.978	***	Accepted

Source: Primary data processed, 2022

The results of the hypothesis testing in this study indicate that intellectual stimulation has a positive effect on organizational performance, thus the proposed hypothesis is accepted. This finding indicates that the effective implementation of intellectual stimulation by leaders of private universities in Southern Sumatra, Indonesia, positively contributes to improving the performance of higher education institutions.

This research finding aligns with the study by Yasin et al. (2014), which suggests that intellectual stimulation can be utilized as an instrument to encourage innovation and improve the performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). They also found a strong positive relationship between innovation and performance. Furthermore, this study's results are consistent with the findings of Kirui et al. (2015), which stated that intellectual stimulation and individual attention have a significant influence on creating effective organizational performance.

Leadership is a central function in organizational management, given that effective leadership plays a crucial role in enhancing organizational competitiveness. Leadership enables the alignment of human resources, time, and other organizational resources to achieve established goals

(Alrowwad et al., 2020). One widely studied form of leadership is transformational leadership, characterized by attributes such as charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention. While there are differing views regarding the influence of each of these attributes, a study by Brandt et al. (2016) showed that transformational leadership characteristics can influence organizational performance through various mechanisms, ultimately improving the organization's overall effectiveness and performance.

CONCLUSION

Leadership issues in higher education are seen as having a strategic role, particularly in driving more effective organizational performance. Optimal achievement of organizational goals will be easier if the leadership style applied is tailored to the characteristics of its members. In leadership practices at Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEI), the application of intellectual stimulation is generally realized through regular coordination meetings, technical guidance in accordance with job descriptions, and various training programs for lecturers and educational staff.

Through these activities, lecturers and PHEI staff are given the opportunity to acquire knowledge and improve

competencies that can be utilized in carrying out daily work activities. In this environment, organizational members are encouraged to consistently use rational and innovative thinking in carrying out their duties. This finding aligns with the view of Leithwood & Jantzi (2006), who stated that leaders who implement intellectual stimulation will stimulate creativity and professionalism by encouraging educators to reconsider their beliefs and values and improve their ability to solve complex problems.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted only in private higher education institutions located in Southern Sumatra, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions of Indonesia with different institutional characteristics. Second, the research employed a cross-sectional design that captured respondents' perceptions at a single point in time, making it difficult to observe changes in leadership practices and organizational performance over time. Third, the model examined only the direct effect of intellectual stimulation on university performance without considering other organizational or individual factors that may explain the relationship more comprehensively.

Future studies are encouraged to expand the geographical coverage by including private and public higher education institutions from different regions of Indonesia or conducting cross-country comparative studies to improve external validity. Furthermore, future research should incorporate mediating or moderating variables, such as organizational commitment, organizational culture, innovation capability, or knowledge sharing, to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which intellectual stimulation influences organizational performance. Longitudinal research designs are also recommended to examine the long-term effects of transformational leadership practices on institutional sustainability and performance.

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